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Government Might Keep Kennedy Death Evidence

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WASHINGTON (AP) — The rifle that killed President John F. Kennedy would remain in government hands forever if Congress approves a bill to be proposed by the Justice Department.

This and other key evidence used by the Warren Commission in pinning the assassination on Lee Harvey Oswald would go into the National Archives if the attorney general determind its retention would be in the public interest.

While no decision has yet been made about what items of evidence the government will want to keep, an authoritative federal source said it will certainly include the 6.5 mm, Italian-made, mail-order rifle the commission said Oswald used to fire on the Kennedy motorcade in Dallas, Tex., on Nov. 22, 1963.

It also will include the .38-caliber pistol the commission said Oswald wielded in the fatal shooting of Dallas policeman J. D. Tippitt on the day of the assassination, the source said.

Oswald's wife, Marina, as administrator of his estate, has been offered $10,000 for the two weapons by a gun collector — even though they are still in governmnt possession.

Under the bill being drafted by the Justice Department, persons whose property is claimed by the government could sue in federal court for compensation.

The Justice Department will base its proposal solely on the argument that because the assassination will be burned in the memories of Americans for generations to come, the key physical evidence should be made absolutely secure so that no doubts can be raised about it in the near or distant future.

"We want it always to be in hands responsible to the government, so that no questions as to its authenticity can be raised if, for instance, the investigation is ever reopened," the government informant said.

Might Need Evidence

The bill resulted from a request by the now-disbanded Warren Commission that the Justice Department solve the